

## APPLICATION FOR RELEASE FROM CUSTODY

**AFFIDAVIT OF BRIE WILLIAMS,  
M.D.**

I, Brie Williams, hereby affirm as follows:

1. I am a doctor duly licensed to practice medicine in the State of California.
  2. I am currently a Professor of Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco (“UCSF”) in the Geriatrics Division, Director of UCSF’s Amend: Changing Correctional Culture Program, as well as Director of UCSF’s Criminal Justice & Health Program. In that capacity, my clinical research has focused on improved responses to disability, cognitive impairment, and symptom distress in older or seriously ill prisoners; a more scientific development of compassionate release policies; and a broader inclusion of prisoners in national health datasets and in clinical research. I have developed new methods for responding to the unique health needs of criminal justice-involved older adults—including an evidence-based approach to reforming compassionate release policies and the design of a new tool to assess physical functioning in older prisoners. I was previously a consultant for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, as well as for other state prison systems.

4. I submit this affidavit in support of any defendant seeking release from custody during the COVID-19 pandemic, so long as such release does not jeopardize public safety and the inmate can be released to a residence in which the inmate can comply with CDC social distancing guidelines. The statements in this affidavit are based only on the current state of emergency and the circumstances described below.

**The Risk of Infection and Accelerated Transmission of COVID-19 within Jails and Prisons is Extraordinarily High.**

5. Prisons and jails are not actually isolated from our communities: hundreds of thousands of correctional officers and correctional healthcare workers enter these facilities every day, returning to their families and to our communities at the end of their shifts, bringing back and forth to their families and neighbors and to incarcerated patients any exposures they have had during the day. Access to testing for correctional staff has been “extremely limited,” guards have reported a “short supply” of protective equipment, and prisons are not routinely or consistently screening correctional officers for symptoms.<sup>1</sup>

6. The risk of exposure is particularly acute in pre-trial facilities where the inmate populations shift frequently.<sup>2</sup> For example, despite the federal government’s guidance to stay

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<sup>1</sup> Keegan Hamilton, *Sick Staff, Inmate Transfers, and No Tests: How the U.S. Is Failing Federal Inmates as Coronavirus Hits*, Vice (Mar. 24, 2020), [https://www.vice.com/en\\_ca/article/jge4vg/sick-staff-inmate-transfers-and-no-tests-how-the-us-is-failing-federal-inmates-as-coronavirus-hits](https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/jge4vg/sick-staff-inmate-transfers-and-no-tests-how-the-us-is-failing-federal-inmates-as-coronavirus-hits).

*See also* Daniel A. Gross, “*It Spreads Like Wildfire*”: *The Coronavirus Comes to New York’s Prisons*, The New Yorker (Mar. 24, 2020), <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/it-spreads-like-wildfire-covid-19-comes-to-new-yorks-prisons>; Josiah Bates, ‘*We Feel Like All of Us Are Gonna Get Corona.*’ *Anticipating COVID-19 Outbreaks, Rikers Island Offers Warning for U.S. Jails, Prisons*, Time (Mar. 24, 2020), <https://time.com/5808020/rikers-island-coronavirus/>; Sadie, Gurman, *Bureau of Prisons Imposes 14-Day Quarantine to Contain Coronavirus*, WSJ (Mar. 24, 2020), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/bureau-of-prisons-imposes-14-day-quarantine-to-contain-coronavirus-11585093075>; Cassidy McDonald, *Federal Prison Workers Say Conflicting Orders on Coronavirus Response Is Putting Lives at Risk*, CBS News (Mar. 19, 2020), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-prison-federal-employees-say-conflicting-orders-putting-lives-at-risk-2020-03-19/>.

<sup>2</sup> Emma Grey Ellis, *Covid-19 Poses a Heightened Threat in Jails and Prisons*, Wired (Mar. 24, 2020), <https://www.wired.com/story/coronavirus-covid-19-jails-prisons/>.

inside and many states' stay-in-place orders, many prosecutors are still arresting individuals and seeking detention.<sup>3</sup> Pre-trial detention facilities are still accepting new inmates who are coming from communities where COVID-19 infection is rampant. As of today's date, the Bureau of Prisons is still moving inmates from facility to facility, including prisoners in New York.<sup>4</sup>

7. Because inmates live in close quarters, there is an extraordinarily high risk of accelerated transmission of COVID-19 within jails and prisons. Inmates share small cells, eat together and use the same bathrooms and sinks. They eat together at small tables that are cleaned only irregularly. Some are not given tissues or sufficient hygiene supplies.<sup>5</sup> Effective social distancing in most facilities is virtually impossible, and crowding problems are often compounded by inadequate sanitation, such as a lack of hand sanitizer or sufficient opportunities to wash hands.<sup>6</sup>

### **Inmate Populations Also Have the Highest Risk of Acute Illness and Poor Health Outcomes if Infected with COVID-19.**

8. There are more than 2.3 million people incarcerated in the United States<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Rex Brown, '*Business as Usual*' For Federal Prosecutors Despite Coronavirus, Nadler Writes, Calling for Release of Inmates, N.Y. Daily News (Mar. 20, 2020), <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/ny-nadler-doj-inmates-20200320-d6hbdjcu5aitppi3ui2xz7tjy-story.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Courtney Bublé, *Lawmakers, Union Urge Halt to All Prison Inmate Transfers*, Government Executive (Mar. 25, 2020), <https://www.govexec.com/management/2020/03/lawmakers-union-urge-halt-all-prison-inmate-transfers/164104/>; Hamilton, *Sick Staff, Inmate Transfers*; Luke Barr, *Despite Coronavirus Warnings, Federal Bureau of Prisons Still Transporting Inmates*, ABC News (Mar. 23, 2020), <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/warnings-bureau-prisons-transporting-inmates-sources/story?id=69747416>.

<sup>5</sup> Justine van der Leun, *The Incarcerated Person Who Knows How Bad It Can Get*, Medium (Mar. 19, 2020), <https://gen.medium.com/what-its-like-to-be-in-prison-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic-1e770d0ca3c5> ("If you don't have money, you don't have soap or tissues."); Keri Blakinger and Beth Schwartzapfel, *How Can Prisons Contain Coronavirus When Purrell Is a Contraband?*, ABA Journal (Mar. 13, 2020), <https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/when-purrell-is-contraband-how-can-prisons-contain-coronavirus>.

<sup>6</sup> Rosa Schwartzburg, '*The Only Plan the Prison Has Is to Leave Us To Die in Our Beds*', The Nation (Mar. 25, 2020), <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/coronavirus-jails-mdc/>.

<sup>7</sup> Kimberly Kindy et al., '*Disaster Waiting to Happen*': *Thousands of Inmates Released as Jails and Prisons Face Coronavirus Threat*, Washington Post (Mar. 25, 2020), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/disaster-waiting-to-happen-thousands-of-inmates-released-as-jails-face-coronavirus-threat/2020/03/24/761c2d84-6b8c-11ea-b313-df458622c2cc\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/disaster-waiting-to-happen-thousands-of-inmates-released-as-jails-face-coronavirus-threat/2020/03/24/761c2d84-6b8c-11ea-b313-df458622c2cc_story.html).

approximately 16% of whom are age 50 or older.<sup>8</sup> The risk of coronavirus to incarcerated seniors is high. “Their advanced age, coupled with the challenges of practicing even the most basic disease prevention measures in prison, is a potentially lethal combination.”<sup>9</sup> To make matters worse, correctional facilities are often ill-equipped to care for aging prisoners, who are more likely to suffer from chronic health conditions than the general public.

9. An estimated 39-43% of all prisoners, and over 70% of older prisoners, have at least one chronic condition, some of the most common of which are diabetes, hypertension, and heart problems.<sup>10</sup> According to the CDC, each of these conditions—as well as chronic bronchitis, emphysema, heart failure, blood disorders, chronic kidney disease, chronic liver disease, any condition or treatment that weakens the immune response, current or recent pregnancy in the last two weeks, inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders, heart disease, lung disease, and certain neurological and neurologic and neurodevelopment conditions<sup>11</sup>—puts them at a “high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Brie Williams *et al.*, *Strategies to Optimize the Use of Compassionate Release from US Prisons*, 110 AJPH S1, S28 (2020), available at <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305434>; Kimberly A. Skarupski, *The Health of America’s Aging Prison Population*, 40 Epidemiologic Rev. 157, 157 (2018), available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5982810/>.

<sup>9</sup> Weihua Li and Nicole Lewis, *This Chart Shows Why the Prison Population is So Vulnerable to COVID-19*, The Marshall Project (Mar. 19, 2020), <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/03/19/this-chart-shows-why-the-prison-population-is-so-vulnerable-to-covid-19>.

<sup>10</sup> Brie A. Williams *et al.*, *How Health Care Reform Can Transform the Health of Criminal Justice-Involved Individuals*, 33 Health Affairs 462-67 (2014), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4034754/>; Brie A. Williams *et al.*, *Coming Home: Health Status and Homelessness Risk of Older Pre-release Prisoners*, 25 J. Gen. Internal Med. 1038-44 (2010), available at <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11606-010-1416-8.pdf>; Laura M. Maruschak *et al.*, *Medical Problems of State and Federal Prisoners and Jail Inmates, 2011-12*, U.S. Dept of Justice (Oct. 4, 2016), at 5, available at <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/mpsfjji1112.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Harvard Health Publishing, *Coronavirus Research Center*, Harvard Medical School (Mar. 25, 2020), <https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/coronavirus-resource-center>.

<sup>12</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Coronavirus Disease 2019: People Who Are at Higher Risk*, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/people-at-higher-risk.html> (last updated Mar. 22, 2020).

10. However, even many young federal prisoners suffer from asthma, rendering them also very vulnerable to coronavirus.<sup>13</sup>

11. But it is not only the elderly, or those with preexisting medical conditions that are at risk of coronavirus in a correctional setting. As of March 23, 2020, New York City reported that “[p]eople ranging in ages from 18 to 44 have accounted for 46 percent of positive tests.”<sup>14</sup> Across the United States, 38% of those hospitalized are between the ages of 20 and 54 and 12% of the intensive care patients are between 20 and 44.<sup>15</sup>

12. This data is of particular concern for inmate populations, since prisoners’ physiological age *averages 10 to 15 years older* than their chronological age.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the consensus of those who study correctional health is that inmates are considered “geriatric, by the age of 50 or 55 years.”<sup>17</sup> It is not clear that prison health care administrations are taking accelerated ageing into account when determining the eligibility criteria for age-related screening tools and medical care protocols for coronavirus, potentially leaving large swathes of the prison population at risk.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Laura Maruschak, *Medical Problems of Jail Inmates*, Dep’t of Justice (Nov. 2006), at p. 2, available at <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/mpji.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Kimiko de Freitas-Tamura, *20-Somethings Now Realizing That They Can Get Coronavirus, Too*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 23, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/nyregion/nyc-coronavirus-young.html>.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> Brie A. Williams *et al.*, *Aging in Correctional Custody: Setting a Policy Agenda for Older Prisoner Health Care*, 102 Am. J. Public Health 1475-81 (2012), available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3464842/>; see also Brie Williams *et al.*, *Detained and Distressed: Persistent Distressing Symptoms in a Population of Older Jail Inmates*, 64 J. Am. Geriatrics Soc. 2349-55 (2016), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/jgs.14310> (“For example, older jail inmates with an average age of 60 in this study reported poor or fair health [and] chronic lung disease . . . at rates similar to those reported by community-based lower income older adults with an average age of 72.”).

<sup>17</sup> Brie A. Williams *et al.*, *The Older Prisoner and Complex Chronic Medical Care* 165-70 in World Health Organization, *Prisons and Health* (2014), <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/64aa/10d3cff6800ed42dd152fcf4e13440b6f139.pdf>.

13. In one study, we found that inmates who died in hospitals were, on average, nearly two decades younger than non-incarcerated decedents, had significantly shorter hospitalizations, and had higher rates of several chronic conditions including cancer, liver disease and/or hepatitis, mental health conditions, and HIV/AIDS.”<sup>19</sup>

### **The Entire Community is at Risk If Prison Populations Are Not Reduced**

14. As the World Health Organization has warned, prisons around the world can expect “huge mortality rates” from Covid-19 unless they take immediate action including screening for the disease.<sup>20</sup>

15. As of March 24, 2020, at least 38 people involved in the New York City correctional system have tested positive for Covid-19.<sup>21</sup> Already, three inmates and three staff at federal correctional facilities across the United States have tested positive for the coronavirus, according to the Federal Bureau of Prisons.<sup>22</sup>

16. Jails and prisons are fundamentally ill-equipped to handle a pandemic.

17. Medical treatment capacity is not at the same level in a correctional setting as it is in a hospital. Some correctional facilities have no formal medical ward and no place to quarantine

<sup>18</sup> Brie A. Williams *et al.*, *Differences Between Incarcerated and Non-Incarcerated Patients Who Die in Community Hospitals Highlight the Need For Palliative Care Services For Seriously Ill Prisoners in Correctional Facilities and in Community Hospitals: a Cross-Sectional Study*, 32 J. Palliative Med. 17-22 (2018), available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0269216317731547>.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* at 20.

<sup>20</sup> Hannah Summers, ‘Everyone Will Be Contaminated’: Prisons Face Strict Coronavirus Controls, The Guardian (Mar. 23, 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/mar/23/everyone-will-be-contaminated-prisons-face-strict-coronavirus-controls>.

<sup>21</sup> Ellis, *Covid-19 Poses a Heightened Threat in Jails and Prisons*.

<sup>22</sup> Ryan Lucas, *As COVID-19 Spreads, Calls Grow to Protect Inmates in Federal Prisons*, NPR (Mar. 24, 2020), <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/03/24/820618140/as-covid-19-spreads-calls-grow-to-protect-inmates-in-federal-prisons>.

sick inmates, other than the facilities' Special Housing Unit (SHU).<sup>23</sup> While the cells in the SHU have solid doors to minimize the threat of viral spread in otherwise overcrowded facilities, they rarely have intercoms or other ways for sick inmates to contact officers in an emergency.<sup>24</sup> This is particularly dangerous for those with COVID-19 infection since many patients with COVID-19 descend suddenly and rapidly into respiratory distress.<sup>25</sup>

18. Even those facilities that do have healthcare centers can only treat relatively mild types of respiratory problems for a very limited number of people.<sup>26</sup> This means that people who become seriously ill while in prisons and jails will be transferred to community hospitals for care. At present, access to palliative care in prison is also limited.

19. Corrections officers may also be particularly vulnerable to coronavirus due to documented high rates of diabetes and heart disease.<sup>27</sup> Prison staff in Pennsylvania, Michigan, New York and Washington state have tested positive for the virus, resulting in inmate quarantines. In Washington, D.C., a U.S. marshal who works in proximity to new arrestees tested positive for the virus, meaning dozens of defendants headed for jail could have been exposed.<sup>28</sup> In New York,

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<sup>23</sup> MCC New York COVID 19 Policy Memo, Mar. 19, 2020, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6818073-MCC-New-York-COVID-19-Policy-Memo.html>; Danielle Ivory, '*We Are Not a Hospital*': A Prison Braces for the Coronavirus, N.Y. Times (Mar. 17, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/17/us/coronavirus-prisons-jails.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Brie Williams *et al.*, *Correctional Facilities in the Shadow of COVID-19: Unique Challenges and Proposed Solutions*, Health Affairs (Mar. 26, 2020), <https://www.healthaffairs.org/do/10.1377/hblog20200324.784502/full/>.

<sup>25</sup> Lizzie Presser, *A Medical Worker Describes Terrifying Lung Failure From COVID-19—Even in His Young Patients*, ProPublica (Mar. 21, 2020), <https://www.propublica.org/article/a-medical-worker-describes--terrifying-lung-failure-from-covid19-even-in-his-young-patients>.

<sup>26</sup> Ellis, *Covid-19 Poses a Heightened Threat in Jails and Prisons*; Li and Lewis, *This Chart Shows Why the Prison Population is So Vulnerable to COVID-19*.

<sup>27</sup> Brie Williams, *Role of US-Norway Exchange in Placing Health and Well-Being at the Center of US Prison Reform*, <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305444> (published Jan. 22, 2020).

<sup>28</sup> Zusha Elinson and Deanna Paul, *Jails Release Prisoners, Fearing Coronavirus Outbreak*, WSJ (Mar. 22, 2020), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/jails-release-prisoners-fearing-coronavirus-outbreak-11584885600> ("We're all headed for some dire consequences," said Daniel Vasquez, a former warden of San Quentin and Soledad state prisons in

236 members of the New York Police Department have tested positive for coronavirus and 3,200 employees are sick, triple the normal sick rate.<sup>29</sup> Two federal prison staffers have also tested positive.<sup>30</sup>

20. For this reason, correctional health is public health. Decreasing risk in prisons and jails decreases risk to our communities.

21. Reducing the overall population within correctional facilities will also help medical professionals spread their clinical care services throughout the remaining population more efficiently. With a smaller population to manage and care for, healthcare and correctional leadership will be better able to institute shelter in place and quarantine protocols for those who remain. This will serve to protect the health of both inmates as well as correctional and healthcare staff.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Dated: San Francisco, California  
March 27, 2020



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Dr. Brie Williams

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California. “They’re in such close quarters—some double- and triple-celled—I think it’s going to be impossible to stop it from spreading.”).

<sup>29</sup> Erin Durkin, *Thousands of NYPD Officers Out Sick Amid Coronavirus Crisis*, Politico (Mar. 25, 2020), <https://www.politico.com/states/new-york/albany/story/2020/03/25/thousands-of-nypd-officers-out-sick-amid-coronavirus-crisis-1268960>.

<sup>30</sup> Elinson and Paul, *Jails Release Prisoners, Fearing Coronavirus Outbreak*.